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Considering the record, it's hard to buy a CIA estimate of Soviets

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Tom Polgar accused me of ignorance in a letter to the editor for suggesting that the Soviet Union is not a superpower in any but a military sense. Ordinarily, letter writers get a free shot. Only because Polgar is both a published writer and a former Central Intelligence Agency man does he earn a reply.

A career with the Central Intelligence Agency is certainly no recommendation as a Soviet expert. CIA misinformation about the Soviet Union is legendary. The record shows that the CIA is to accurate information about the Soviet Union what the Tampa Bay Bucs are to Super Bowl competition.

Edward Luttwak, a defense analyst, and others share the contention that the Soviet Union is a superpower only in the sense of its military power. Polgar contends that the Soviet Union is the second-largest economy in the world.

Lev Navrosov, a Soviet emigre and writer, once analyzed every published word by the CIA on the Soviet Union, including all of its testimony to Congress that had been declassified. His conclusion: The CIA knows practically nothing about the Soviet

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Union. Navrosov found, for example, that CIA estimates of Soviet agricultural production given to Congress in testimony were identical to agricultural production figures *published by the Soviet Union and available in Marxist bookstores in Washington.*

Navrosov found that the CIA could not account for the end use of a sizable amount of its claimed Soviet steel production. Either the estimate was wrong or the Soviets were successful in hiding a lot of steel.

We all remember, of course, the CIA study in 1977 on Soviet oil production that predicted a major oil crisis for the Soviet Union. Like so many other CIA predictions, this one proved embarrassingly inaccurate and was drastically revised in 1981.

The CIA, for example, contended the Soviet Union would not place offensive weapons in Cuba, would not invade Third World countries, that the Shah of Iran would not fall and that the Soviet Union was not involved in world terrorism. The CIA's underestimates of Soviet military power from 1960-1976 and from 1976-1980 are well-documented.

Gen. George Keegan, former head of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said that no one has to worry about a mole (a Soviet spy) in the CIA because the CIA, as an institution, is a mole. Certainly the evidence bears that out, although the CIA also has had far more of its share of individual moles than most intelligence agencies.

No better evidence of institutional stupidity can be found than the CIA's complaints when Israeli agents assassinated a top PLO official in Beirut. He was, the CIA complained, their source of information on the area. Not only was the man a sworn enemy of an American ally and a key figure in the Munich massacre, but the PLO is virtually a branch office of the Soviet KGB as anyone can see simply by visiting a PLO office and reading their published literature. What a wonderful source of information. No wonder the CIA was so wrong so often.

Perhaps Polgar and I have a different definition of superpower. If we use the contraries of Polgar's arguments for Soviet non-military superpower status — that the United States is *not* the world's largest producer of oil, steel, cement, wheat, gold, diamonds and is far behind the Soviet Union in merchant shipping, fishing, and railroad transport, then the United States, according to Polgar's definition, is not a superpower.

The Soviet empire, spanning two continents, does of course possess enormous resources, but its failures are evidenced by the fact that it must hold its empire together by military force, that it achieves its military power at the price of enormous sacrifices on the part of the civilian sector, that it must act as a parasite on the East European economies and that it relies so heavily on Western technology, stolen or purchased, as well as Western credits.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn correctly characterized the Soviet Union — it is a large and dangerous dinosaur — but nevertheless, a dinosaur. An empire deathly afraid of Xerox machines and poets may be a military giant, but a superpower it is not.

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